

# **Ideological Discourse Analysis of the Functions of Feedback Comments on Online Reports of Socio-political Crises in Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** This study examines discursive strategies in online news feedback platforms and their possible impact on readers' opinions and ideological perspectives. It argues that discourse forms and patterns in these platforms tend to reveal subjective value judgments, and these have the potential of moulding public opinions and social attitudes. Data comprises 201 reader comments collected from online news media reports on two socio-political crises in Nigeria. Findings reveal that news readers, as social actors use discourse to shape the attitudes and value judgments of other readers. This is achieved through the use of ideological strategies such as polarisation, generalisation and hyperbole among others. This study further establishes that interactions on news feedback forums are largely based on shared knowledge of the social context, and that socio-political crises give rise to lexical choices and discourse patterns that are controlled by already acquired ideological judgments of language users.

**Key Words:** ideology, discourse, feedback comments, social crises, Nigeria

## **1. Introduction**

The development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and its influence on virtually every aspect of human communication is largely responsible for the development of Computer-Mediated Communication (henceforth CMC). CMC involves human interpersonal communication via the instrumentality of computers (Herring, 1996). Computer-Mediated Discourse (henceforth CMD) is closely related to CMC; however it places emphasis on the analysis of language use in CMC through discourse analysis methods (Herring (2001). The platforms for CMD include weblogs (or blogs), Internet Relay Chats (IRCs), microblogs, e-mails, discussion forums among others.

The Internet became popular in Nigeria in the early 1990's and the

Nigerian media landscape began to explore the opportunities the new technology offered. Hence, a number of mainstream newspapers migrated to the Internet since it enables enhanced discursive opportunity structures for them (Kperogi, 2011). One of such is interactivity. The Internet enables online news media feedback platforms (such as discussion forums, comment boxes, sharing options on social networking sites at the end of news stories) where readers are able to respond to or react to the news contents by posting their comments and opinions on the news articles reported. Schultz (2000) compares these platforms of interactivity to the traditional newspapers' letters to the editor. In contrast to letters to the editor, readers' comments are not edited, editors only remove comments

which violate editorial guidelines (Unuabonah, 2012).

Interestingly, these feedback platforms have become discussion sites for readers, thereby, increasing reader-reader communication. And because of the global influence of the Internet, online news media have been able to gather popular response from readers especially in crisis situations, since readers in recent times, have become active members of the public (Zhou & Moy, 2007; Unuabonah, 2012). Readers see interactivity platforms in newspapers as outlets for civic engagement as they ‘not only post comments, they also engage in some forms of social analyses and criticisms’ of the socio-political order of the society, thereby, gratifying their needs for information, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment (Chiluwa, 2011b:81). Readers can educate others and share their individual experiences. They are also given room to express and validate their personal opinions among the group of discussants. They can even infuse humour and arguments into discussions while interacting amongst members of the discussion community. This strengthens the readers’ bond as though they were involved in face to face communication. It is therefore obvious that the practice of online journalism has created a larger space for public discourse than the

traditional feedback method of ‘letters to the editor’ in mainstream newspapers. However, Diakopoulos and Naaman (2011) observe that the topicality of the news stories reported have considerable impact on the nature of the readers’ comments. Also, when sensitive issues are discussed, comments tend to be sometimes offensive and unrelated to the news story (Burke & Kraut, 2008).

## **2. Background to the Study**

Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa with a population of over 170 million people<sup>1</sup> of heterogeneous ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious identities. These diversities have often been viewed as being responsible for recurrent sectarian crises in the country<sup>2</sup> which date back to the Uthman Dan Fodio Jihad of 1804. This study focuses on two social crises that occurred in 2011 and 2012, namely, *Kaduna post-electoral crisis*, and *Aluu killings*.

### **2.1 Kaduna Post-Electoral Crisis**

The Kaduna post-electoral crisis began on Sunday, 17th April, 2011, following the announcement of the nation’s presidential elections results. The results showed that the

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[http://www.indexmundi.com/nigeria/demographics\\_profile.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/nigeria/demographics_profile.html)

<sup>2</sup> Turaki, Y. (1982). “Historical Roots of Crises and Conflicts in Nigeria with Reference to Northern Nigeria and Kaduna State”. <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!msg/yorubaaffairs/Jc1LF1F1tOU/3raiSjvBetsJ>

incumbent, Goodluck Jonathan was clearly ahead from the total votes cast. As shown by earlier results, he was leading in all the southern states, except Osun state, while his closest opponent, Mohammed Buhari was leading in Kaduna and all the North-western states.

The crisis that resulted from the election's results assumed both ethnic and religious dimensions and resulted in the loss of hundreds of lives. According to a report of the *Kaduna State Judicial Commission of Inquiry* set up to investigate the crisis, one of the remote causes of the crisis was the removal of the zoning system that existed in the nation's ruling party, i.e. the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The northern elite felt they were being cheated. This feeling was further strengthened when Goodluck Jonathan (a southerner) won the party's primaries. Subsequent events within PDP caused many of the northerners to shift their allegiance to the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC). Hence, the crisis was a reflection of grievances.<sup>3</sup>

## **2.2 Aluu Killings**

On 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2012, four students of the University of Port Harcourt, namely, *Biringa Lordson* of the Department of Theatre Arts; *Ugonna Obuzor* (Geology); *Michael Toku* and *Tekena Erikena* (Civil Engineering) were lynched at

*Umuokiri* community of Aluu in *Ikwerre* Local Government Area of Rivers State. The manner in which they were killed was videotaped, showing the students being paraded naked for hours all around the village, and roasted alive before a watching, jeering crowd. The video got spread over the Internet, and attracted lots of condemnation by people who perceived the murder as jungle justice. The students, before their murder, were accused of stealing a laptop computer and a BlackBerry phone. The victims are generally referred to as the "Aluu 4".<sup>4</sup>

## **3. Computer-Mediated Discourse Studies in Nigeria**

Studies have examined Web 1.0 communicative exchanges, mobile telephony and text messaging. Social media and multiplatform Web 2.0 discourse in relation to Herring's (2004) approaches to online discourse analysis, namely, text analysis, conversational analysis, interactional sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis have also been studied extensively. Research in CMD did not begin in Nigeria until the popularity of the Internet and CMC in the late 1990s.

Among popular early studies in digital communication in Nigeria is Taiwo (2008) - a study of SMS messages that explores socio-cultural features of SMS discourse. Chilwa

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<sup>3</sup> <http://blueprintng.com/2012/06/how-post-election-crisis-erupted-in-kaduna-inquiry-report/>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://pmnewsigeria.com/2012/10/15/anger-over-aluu-killings/>

(2008) investigates Nigerianisms in SMS messages and argues against the notion that CMC poses negative pedagogical challenges to English teaching and learning in Nigeria. Oni (2011) carries out a comparative lexico-semantic study of SMS and IM. These studies appear to have opened up research interests in CMD among Africa scholars leading to several emerging researches. Such studies include Taiwo and Chilwa (2012), which is a collection of CMD studies in Africa. Prior to this, there had been studies of the use of online social media for political participation and social resistance (Ifukor 2010; Chilwa, 2011b; 2012a, 2012b; Taiwo, 2012). Taiwo (2008b) explores stylistic forms CMD, while Shoki and Oni (2008) examine semiotic features of CMD. In all, CMD researchers in Nigeria investigate human interactions across computer-mediated platforms by investigating structure, meaning, interaction, and social behaviour.

#### **4. Ideology in Discourse and Social Cognition as Ideology**

Discourse plays a fundamental role in the daily expression and reproduction of cognitive and social ideologies. Cognitive structures and social representations of shared values, norms, attitudes, knowledge and experiences are expressed and reproduced discursively within socially situated text and talk. Thus, discourse can reflect an effort to control and guide people's minds

towards what is perceived as ideal. Ideology is therefore the systemic core that links together society, discourse and social cognition (van Dijk, 1995; 2005).

An analysis of ideological strategies in discourse offers an interpretive filter to the relationship between language and society. Hence, social structures such as manipulations, concealment of social actors or recipients of action, and legitimation of power and dominance that cognitively influence social perception are reflected in discourse. van Dijk (2001), in explaining the controlling power of discourse, uses the term "discourse access." This control is defined by the context and the structures of a text. The structure of discourse can be controlled to define discourse access. Meaning, form and style can be controlled through such linguistic processes as rewording and grammatical changes. Fairclough (1995:27 cited in Chilwa, 2012a: 51) refers to these as "ideological-linguistic processes". Other forms of linguistic ordering include nominalisation/topicalisation, passivisation, lexicalisation, layering or foregrounding. This control of the structure of discourse is indexical to the "hidden power" of discourse (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1998).

Both the context of discourse and the structure of discourse play significant roles in influencing mental representations or perceptions. Once discourse is

controlled, mind control becomes easier to achieve, and people tend to accept as true opinions, knowledge and beliefs from sources perceived to be credible and reliable such as scholars, experts, professionals or the mass media (Nesler et al. 1993 cited in van Dijk 2001) especially when they have no alternative source of information.

The mass media have the power to control public discourse (van Dijk, 2001:356). This is achieved by discursive constructions that either de-emphasise and de-focus dispreferred information or emphasise and focus on preferred information. Van Dijk (cited in Chilwa 2012a:51) also argues that “the mass media are largely responsible for the ideological representation of group attitudes” through their choice of and patterning of words. The mass media embark on a hegemony mission where readers are schooled to believe what the mass media want them to believe, and to perceive what is being read from the mass media’s perspective. The extent to which they succeed at this becomes evident in news feedback platforms where recipients develop new cognitive ideological perspectives in relation to the mass media’s goals or reject any discursive control from the mass media by consciously communicating their already acquired and preferred ideological standpoints.

A few studies have been carried in Nigeria on ideology in the Nigerian mass media. Taiwo (2004, 2007) for instance observes that ‘emotive vocabulary’ and peculiar rhetorical devices are used in news headlines which are used to initiate, sustain discourse and shape the views of the readers on national issues. Odeunmi (2010) employs insights from critical discourse analysis (CDA) and pragmatics to ‘track’ the ideological values inherent in the reports of *The Punch*, (a Nigerian newspaper). The study reveals the strategic ideological representations and unequal power relations that exist between the political and the judicial institutions with reference to the Nigerian Supreme Court’s verdict on Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar’s qualification for the 2007 general election. Chilwa (2011a) reveals the implications of lexical variations and labelling in the press to depict the positive ‘us’ (i.e. the media and the government) and the negative ‘them’ (i.e. the Niger Delta militia groups). Through these, the mass media impose on their readers some social attitudes towards, and value judgements about the ethnic militias. Furthermore, Chilwa (2012a) employs pragmatics and CDA to highlight the ideological and discursive functions of news stories in three Nigerian newsmagazines from 1996 to 2002 during the height of military rule and the beginning of democracy in Nigeria. Abioye (2012a) identifies

the ideological motives and functions of discourse patterns in news headlines. The study concludes that the choice of words and the transitivity options chosen by the media reflect the ideological perspectives that they project.

### **5. Sociocognitive Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis**

Van Dijk (1998) argues that discourse has a sociocognitive interface. CDA should therefore explore the relationship between the mind, discourse and the society. He adds that cognitive structures are central to mediating discourse and the society, that is, “mental representations or processes influence the production and interpretation of discourse as well as knowledge, ideologies, and beliefs shared by a group of people” (Chiluwa, 2012a: 54). Therefore, discourse has the power to control the mind by a reproduction of dominance and hegemony, since discourse is a multidimensional social phenomenon (van Dijk, 2001, 2009; Chiluwa, 2012a).

Discourse has the ability to manipulate how recipients of discourse understand an event or action. This is because the manner in which discourse structures are employed to describe and explain events or actions can give rise to varying ideological interpretations in individuals or social groups. These interpretations are based on shared sociocultural knowledge, attitudes and ideologies. In most cases

therefore, discourse is ‘produced and understood in terms of mental models that combine personal and social beliefs – in a way that both explains the uniqueness of all discourse production and understanding, and the similarity of our understanding of the same text’ (van Dijk, 2006:369). Van Dijk further explains that discourse becomes manipulative when it not only changes or creates personal mental models, but also controls the shared social representations of groups of people. This discursive influence is as a result of the context and the structures of text and talks (van Dijk, 2001). Hence, discourse is a cognitive as well as social practice.

Van Dijk (2004) proposes twenty seven ideological strategies that are evident in discourse. Ten of which were identified in the data for this study are (i) *actor description* (i.e. the way actors or members of a particular society are described either in neutral terms or in negative or positive terms); (ii) *example/illustration* (i.e. a powerful move in argumentation to give concrete example in defence of what is being said); (iii) *evidentiality* (i.e. using proofs to support what is being said); (iv) *generalisation* (i.e. making generalisations to formulate prejudices); (v) *hyperbole* (i.e. the use of intensifying rhetorical device to amplify meaning); (vi) *irony* (i.e. saying something and meaning the opposite); (vii) *lexicalisation* (i.e. an ideological strategy that involves

deliberate choices of words); (viii) *polarisation* (i.e. placing/categorizing people into in-groups (us) and out-groups (them); (ix) *vagueness* (i.e. using vague expressions that do not have well-defined referents); (x) *victimisation* (i.e. negative portrayal of others).

## **6. Methodology**

The data for this study comprise a purposively obtained sample of 201 news readers' comments on two socio-political crises in Nigeria within 2011 and 2012. These comments were drawn from the feedback platforms of ten Nigerian online news websites. They include: *Business Day, PM News, The Sun, The Vanguard, The Nation, Osun Defender, Premium Times, This Day, News Direct* and *Sahara Reporters* ("a reportorial platform for Nigerian citizens"<sup>5</sup>). The selection of these news media is purposive, based on the fact that the selected news media platforms have been able to gather wide readership as evident in their feedback platforms.

A qualitative analysis of data is carried out in this study. Sampled readers' comments are numbered C1- C201 ('C' representing 'comments') and are analysed under discursive themes that reflect

deliberate lexical choices and linguistic strategies. Ten of the twenty seven ideological strategies proposed by van Dijk are adopted in the analysis.

### **6.1 Actor Description and Polarisation**

As highlight above, actor description is a strategy that is used to portray 'actors' or agents in either positive or negative lights, while polarisation is a categorisation strategy that constructs the in-group positively and the out-group negatively. Evident in a number of the readers' comments is this dichotomous polarisation strategy, which thrives in crisis situations. In the news feedback platforms, this polarisation portends the innocent, guileless 'us' and the evil 'they'. This strategy is at par with actor description, as the polarisation is made evident by the linguistic elements through which agents are described within the text. The commenters and the assumed audience who identify with the 'Aluu 4' are made to belong to the 'us' in-group while the killers belong to the 'them' out-group. C2, C11, C24, C25 and C158 are examples from the data.

While the writers in C2 and C11 are sympathetic with the 'Aluu 4' by using expressions that denote a sense of belonging, association and affiliation such as 'promising lads' and 'our brothers' for the victims, their killers are constructed as 'murderers', 'merchants of evil,' 'witches and wizards', and 'blood

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<sup>5</sup> Tudun Adeyemo, "Why I Write: Omoyele Sowore," *Tell*, September 7, 2009. The interview is republished on the reporter's blog and can be found here: <http://tundunadeyemo.blogspot.com/2009/09/why-i-write-omoyele-sowore.html> (accessed April 24, 2010).

sucking demons.’ C25 refers to the entire Aluu community as being ‘very sick.’ The metaphor was specifically chosen to *imply that the community needs urgent attention, and in this case the remedy to the sickness is justice.*

Also, while reacting to a story on the Kaduna post-electoral crisis, the writer of C158 describes two groups of people namely the ‘innocent non muslims in d north,’ and the ‘bloodthirsty, brainless, illiterate zombies, mumu people who are also hungry (and) myopic,’ who are likened to ‘fanatical almagiris.’ The comment appears to align with the ‘gentle, peace-loving, non-muslims’ in the north that are within the ‘us’ in-group, who became prey to ‘them.’ The actor description of the implied ‘attackers’ through the use of demeaning adjectives and name-calling is used to reflect the writer’s personal value judgement of the events in northern Nigeria. Such discursive representations from writers who themselves appear to have developed negative attitude towards the north, are likely to generate from the reader further negative evaluation of the people and events in northern Nigeria. Unfortunately, this also reflects the socio-political and historical tension that has existed in the definition of identities of northern and southern Nigerians. For instance, those who view Nigeria as a forced unity and advocate a break-up, have always observed the social and cultural

dichotomy between northern and southern Nigeria (see Chiluiwa 2012d). The comments further suggest that even in the north, there are still some forms of religious dichotomy and intolerance between fanatical Muslims and liberal Muslims and between Muslims and Christians.

C2: That boy called cux is cursed! No matter how long he goes into hiding he will not escape the certain judgement that must come to him in a very short while. You cannot lie upon people and eventually kill them when you know you were the guilty one. You killed these innocent boys because you wanted to cover your shame and callousness under the disguise of calling them names that weren't theirs. Look at mess you have done, to the their families, friends, associates, fans, people that would have been eventually touched by these promising lads and even to your miserable self that murdered sleep the moment you pronounced judgement on them when you shouted thief...

C11: Search for them, it is easy, they are all registered with one interactive site or the other, na only nija police no sabi investigate....u tru doz our brothers chance to



survive by leaving them to  
their fate cos of stones

C24: Surely we are from  
ALLAH, & onto HIM is our  
return. May those behind  
the massacre & killings of  
Aluu4 never rest in peace,  
& may hell-fire be their  
final abode, ameen! May the  
innocent departed souls  
RIP, ameen!

C25: Let justice prevail how  
can man be so cruel to his  
fellow man jst like that the  
entire allu community are  
witches&wizard blood  
sucking demons may d soul  
of the innocent student  
continue 2 hurt dem&their  
children 4 ever

C158: Good thinking on d  
part of d security agencies  
in imposing d curfew. D  
lives of innocent non  
muslims in d north must be  
protected from these  
bloodthirsty, brainless,  
illiterate zombies. Buhari  
can only fool his zombie  
followers. In dis life and in  
d life after, Buhari cannot  
win election in Nigeria. I  
urge d security agencies to  
meet fire with fire, Nigeria  
cannot be held hostage by  
some hungry, myopic and  
fanatical almagiris. Mumu  
people who dont realize dat  
if not for d rest of Nigeria,

hunger, poverty and disease  
would have wiped them out.

The writer of C114, by representing  
the actors (i.e. the killers of the  
'Aluu4') as 'Christian terrorists,'  
attempts to construct Muslims in a  
positive light and accuses Christians  
of being judgmental of Islam,  
especially in the case of Boko Haram  
insurgence. However, the commenter  
is quick to draw the line between  
members of Boko Haram who he  
refers to as 'mad people' and 'true  
Islamists,' still emphasising the  
dichotomy between Muslim sects in  
northern Nigeria. The comment  
implicitly presents to the reader an  
assumption that Christians are  
stereotypic and not tolerant of  
Muslims in Nigeria. While Muslim  
acts are described as 'terrorist',  
similar acts by Christian are not  
described as such. The commenter  
therefore creates the term, 'Christian  
terrorists.' S/he asks at some point  
why the Aluu killings were not  
attributed to 'Christianists;' since, if  
such had occurred in the northern  
part of the country, all fingers would  
have pointed at the perpetrators as  
'Muslim terrorists,' or Islamists.  
C114 is possibly a reaction to earlier  
statements in the mass media that  
have hitherto indicted Islam. In other  
words, the incident that resulted in  
the killing of the 'Allu4' is a clear  
indication that terrorist acts are not to  
be attributed exclusively to Islamists.

C114: "I've been thinking  
about those Christian  
Terrorists who hacked those

4UniPort students 2death &all I can think of is "is this what they are taught every other Sunday? If u r a Christian reading this I know u will b angry & say 'this is nonsense! Is it really nonsense? Those Aluu Youths killed those boys in cold blood, &I haven't heard anyone say Oh they are christianist! But after †hξ Mubi killings †hξ tabloids kept on saying 'Islamists' it's BH. I don't care if they are boko haram members, but I care if u call dem Islamists. Because some wicked people go on rampage killing others doesn't mean their religion asked them2. If u wouldn't call those Aluu youths Christianists or attribute their gruesome act to christianity then please don't judge Islam by d activities of some mad people. Islam doesn't preach terrorism either.

Actor description and polarisation reveal individual perspectives and shared socio-cultural value judgments of prejudice, intolerance and injustice among the readers against the killers of 'Aluu 4,' Muslims in Nigeria, and the people of the northern region. While prejudice and hate against the killers are understandable, intolerance against northern Muslims and the attribution of violence exclusively to

them are not. This clearly play out the in-group and out-group ideological views of the readers, and it is evident that these opinions, perceptions and perspectives are sometimes pre-formed; that is, they are not necessarily created by the reports. The goal however, is to attempt to sell individual judgements to other readers.

## **6.2 Evidentiality and Example**

News readers make conscious efforts to convince fellow readers to share their perspectives to news stories. Some of these are done through the use of what van Dijk (2004) describes as 'example' and 'evidentiality.' These mean that in shaping the social attitudes and value judgements of other readers, some news readers in their comments cite examples to back up their claims or arguments. They also provide 'evidence' in order to prove their point. Van Dijk (2004) argues that the use of examples is a powerful strategy in discourse when establishing a point.

Examples from the data show that writers apply some bitter, accusing, and sneering constructions to prove (with examples) that the Nigerian Police for instance, have been negligent, careless and corrupt in their handling of social crises in Nigeria. C84 for example amplifies a statement in the news story and use this as evidence to prove that the four young men that were murdered were actually at the mercy of their killers. The proposition presented in

the comment is that the police have only told half-truth about the circumstances surrounding the killing of the 'Aluu4.' The Nigerian Police themselves are accused of killing 'countless armless Nigerian citizens for bribes' (C84).

C84: The IGP has narrated part of what happened but he lied and I believed the sister of one of the Victims. She said when she arrived there the Police was addressing the mobs and they were laughing but they eventually entered their Vehicle and left the Scene. Its was after they left that the victims were murdered. The IG lied that they policemen were stoned so they ran away, Is it the same Nigerian Police that have Murdered countless armless Nigerian Citizen for bribes that would run away from mobs stoning them...

C88: ... If people gather under the tree now playing ludo, you will see armed police men in full combat regalia and power bikes coming to ask for egunje.....bribe! Nigerian police is finished and am sure the people concerned know this. The other day thieves invaded my home and made away with valuables including an apple iPad 2. After filing a report

at a nearby police station hinting that the device may be traceable, the ignorant DPO vomited asking me to drop 400,000 for him to trace the iPad. In 2012....!

C79: ... When you go to them for help, all they say is we don't have fuel in the car. Pls buy fuel. We don't have bullet in our gun etc...

C91:... Deceive us or sorry tell another story on the dead Mr. Ugo who was shot 5 days after his wedding by your boys in lagos.

C92: ...our policemen preferes to kill innocent pple am sure. bcos a 20yres of old sales girl was shot by one of them this week, every month one corofu must kill and give stupid excuse just like this boys issue. what a pity.

The above examples from the data however merely cite examples of incidents involving the police and the poor handling of such incidents. They do not provide sufficient evidence that the police actually committed the crimes they are accused of. The use of these strategies however, reflects efforts to amass condemnation of the Nigerian police from fellow readers. The comments are in themselves judgmental and they reflect cognitively embedded opinions and perspectives which would not be

readily altered, but which are likely to be adopted by other readers. This is likely to further deteriorate the already endangered public confidence on the police and negatively affect their response to security. If the public is always made to see the police as 'corrupt' and incompetent, they will generally react negatively to their civic responsibility of supporting the police to fight crime.

### **6.3 Generalisation**

Van Dijk (2004) further argues that instead of providing facts, language users make generalisations to formulate prejudices and emphasise negative characteristics. Generalisation for example, is used to express bias and sentiments when the writer of C139 below for example, remarks that the 'north are always violent.' The writer clearly reflects exclusion from the north (the out-group) suggesting that the writer is a southerner (the in-group). The expression further implies that Nigeria is a nation clearly marked by parts, which have their differing ideological perspectives to one another. The statement therefore, appears to create a general agreement among other readers, as though, violence is an identity marker of the north. This might be readily accepted by other readers, especially those who are not so familiar with the Nigerian situation. And such readers are likely to unnecessarily react with prejudice to

northerners. The comment though, might be attributed to the number of crises that have occurred in the region, especially when compared to other regions of the nation.

Similarly, the writer of C35 unfortunately makes a dangerous generalisation by describing Nigeria as a 'wicked country.' This implies that all Nigerians are wicked, while 'wicked' (in the context of social crisis) implies that Nigerian only react to injustice if it is in their selfish interests. This appears to be overly all-inclusive, as the claim is backed up with neither facts nor substantial evidence. It is probable that the message being passed across here is that Nigeria is not safe, more especially in the face of an unreliable police. This message, it is assumed is being passed by a Nigerian, and it is obvious that s/he has since lost his commitment to the country; the commenter is seemingly not assured of his/her security in the country, and therefore expresses this, attempting to make other readers believe that same thing applies to them.

C35: here IG no accidental discharge here these boys were beaten for hours before being set ablaze how long does it take to reinforce, i wish one of the ig blood relative was there wicked police wicked country

C139: i don't know why north are always violent. is

it bcos of the high level of illiteracy in the region?

Generalisations reflect the negative stereotypes formed by other Nigerians against the people of the northern region. This further indicates that patriotism among Nigerians is seemingly minimal.

#### **6.4 Lexicalisation**

Lexicalisation is a deliberate choice of words that project intended meanings, while hyperbole is a device that is used to amplify meaning. Reader-feedback forums have created platforms for citizenship participation where readers do not only air their opinions on the news reports, but also make deliberate efforts to be heard. Therefore, they express their personal views and assessments of news stories, and in the process, also try to shape other readers' interpretations of news stories. Hence, they make use of intensifying rhetorical devices, such as adjectives that amplify meaning, and also create a preferred point of view. For example, C16 below, not only describes the death of 'Aluu 4' as a 'horrible death,' he adds that it is the 'worst death ever seen.' The superlative comparison narrows the nature of the death to depict extremity. Describing the death as 'bad' or 'worse' might have made the death appear less grave. Thus, the choice to amplify meaning is not only to state how bad the death was, but to create a consensus that the

killings had a touch of unfair unnaturalness in them.

Another instance appears in C99, where the writer of the comment uses negative intensifiers to describe the police explanation of the incident. The police report is described as 'repulsive and repugnant explanation and excuse.' 'Repulsive' and 'repugnant' are near synonyms, and when used together in the same expression, the terms convey the intense emotion of the commenter. In C14, the police report is further described as 'most shameless,' this also expressing the feeling of hate and sadness. The use of capital letters in the comment denotes emphasis, shouting or exclamation. The modality 'must,' in the comment expresses a perception of certainty. It is not surprising that the writer voices the perception the report strategically create and infers what the report does not explicitly state.

The police in C35 below are referred to as 'wicked police.' The stigmatising value attached to the police on one hand is drawn from the report, and also from Nigerians' shared belief about the police and their acts. For instance, the comment claims that the police' supposed 'accidental discharge,' stems from their sheer wicked and selfish nature. The commenter concludes that the police chose negligence because they were not directly related to any of the 'Aluu 4.' He further condemns the nation for selfishness. Agreed

that most of the comments arose out of frustration and sadness over incessant social crises in Nigeria; but it is quite clear that many of the critiques against the police are unfounded and illogical.

C14: "The IG explained that the police patrol team sent to the scene of the lynching could not rescue the students from the mob as members of the team were pelted with stones" - THIS MUST BE THE MOST SHAMELESS STATEMENT I HAVE EVER HEARD!!

C16: i wonder if their soul can ever rest in peace cos they died a horrible death. its the worst death ve ever seen.i just pray this wroth of God on this generation is not worst than that of sodom and gomorrah may their soul rest in peace amen I m as flabbergasted as you are!

C35: here IG no accidental dischrage here these boys were beaten for hours before being set ablaze how long does it take to reinforce,i wish one of the ig blood relative was there wicked police wicked country

C38: God will punish the police join! Useless horrible statement! I can't curb the mob and u want to me book

haram? WTF is dis man saying??? Noting to scare people away?? Liesss liesss liesss. They simply allowed this to happen bcos they don't know it wil go viral dis much! Useless people! What goes around will always come around for everyone involved in this matter! Their blood shall cry on them! Pathetic! No peace for the wicked! No peace for that boi who made false alarm. Sad sad sad!

C99: I think our police chiefs require crisis communication skills as obviously demonstrated by the pathetic reasons given by the IG. I am ashamed to hear this is coming from a number one police officer in Nigeria. Is this the best we can offer? What a repulsive and repugnant explanation and excuse. Now our security agents are so weak that it only requires stones to send them away from carrying out their sworn duty. The truth is that the so called police men agreed with the community that those boys were actually robbers and should be killed. Eye witness account was that they were told those boys were robber, and they went back given ample time for the mob to kill

those boys. The blood of those boys rest on the police.

Some semantically related lexical items are placed side by side in the comments to emphasise what is being said and to intensify meaning. For instance, the writer of C22 below juxtaposes 'trauma and pain,' C24 also, juxtaposes 'massacre and killings.' 'Massacre' and 'killings' are near synonyms that can evoke greater tension among readers. 'Massacre' connotes the killing of a vulnerable set of people. The 'Aluu 4,' it would seem were vulnerable because they were strangers in the town of Aluu. Hence, they were viewed as defenceless in the face of a mob that was bent on lynching them. They were the accused, though the allegations levelled against them were later confirmed as false.

C185 plays on words to intensify the message to the reading public. He indirectly likens Nigerian leaders to 'the devil' who have provoked the masses to embark on evil and destructive demonstrations ('DEMONstations').

C22: They should be killed in the same manner they killed those young souls. Or else they won't understand the trauma and pain they went through, before they eventually gave up. They shouldn't be sent to any jail. In fact, after they might have been lynched the same way

they did to the innocent boys. They should be thrown into a big ditch, pour petrol on them, burn and bury them. I've never been so touched by any killing than this one. It gives me nightmares, I feel for them and their family. May their souls rest in peace.

C24: Surely we are from ALLAH, & onto HIM is our return. May those behind the massacre & killings of Aluu4 never rest in peace, & may hell-fire be their final abode, amen! May the innocent departed souls RIP, amen!

C185: Only in the reigns of the DEVIL that the magnitude of EVIL that has besieged our nation thrives - violent DEMONstations, killings, hatred, desecration of places of worship, wanton destructions, and sundry upheavals.

Some other lexicalisation strategies reflect name-calling and abusive labelling; these are also strategies of 'actor description' and 'victimisation' (van Dijk, 2004). The northern protesters are referred to as 'fools' (C138), 'idiots' (C138), 'animals' (C142), 'street urchins' (C143), 'rascals' (C149), 'illiterates' (C151) among others. The appositive, 'taliban' for 'Buhari' in C136 appears as a deliberate

metaphorical choice to announce Buhari's defeat, just like the United States and opposition forces defeated the Taliban in December, 2001. It also seems to suggest that Buhari is violence-oriented. Muhamadu Buhari, a former military president of Nigeria, was a presidential candidate of one of the political parties in the 2011 elections.

C138: wot is happening to these nothern fools? I know u all, so if am to suggest, police will not solve this problem rather involvement of army and navy. Since the past 50yrs the northerners have been fooling us in this country, have they ever heard of presidential election result riots in the east, south or west? They are just idiots without future n vision.

C142: God forbid this animals. North my foot. Jonathan rules.....

C149: Buhari should stand up and be counted. As a patrotic Nigerian that wants the growth and success of this country, he should make a speech on national media and congratulate GEJ so that all these rascals in the North will keep quiet. Nigerians needs peace and not violence.

C151: Its so amazing how the illiterates reacted to

these results even when the results are fully announced. How could they have expected Buhari of all aspirant to lead us to the promise land.. Illiteracy has indeed eaten so deep into the Bone Marrows of our citizens to react in such an absurd manner. Nigeria will not divide no matter how much they try.. Congratulations President Goodluck Ebele Johnathan...

C136: Buhari the taliban is responsible for the violence. He was asked this morning his message to his rampaging supporters by aljazeera tv, his response is that he will wait for INEC's verdict, rather than ask his supporters to stop the violence. Buhari is a coward! No wonder he couldn't resist IBB in 1985. WAWA!

C143: Only fools take to killing when staring defeat in the eyes...and the way this is going, i am afraid the North will remain stagnant despite the economic and infrastructural growth we all anticipate in the emerging new Nigeria, tell me how you can develop when at the slightest provocation you burn and destroy everything you have including peoples



lives? Buhari must call his street urchins to order or else he should be held accountable for inciting his followers into violence

The identification of these discourse strategies reveals the subtlety that is inherent in language use when it is examined in the context of people and situations. It reveals the sociocultural meanings and practices that are played out in crisis discourse and how public opinion is shaped by discursive choices, forms and patterns of news reports and readers' comments.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study has in its scope shown that discourse is a powerful tool for shaping ideological perspectives, social attitudes and value judgments. These ideological orientations are created by cognition, that is, readers react to situations based on knowledge that has been cognitively acquired from read texts (news stories) or from social conditions. This implies that readers are either reacting directly to news reportage or they are reacting to news stories based on their knowledge of social realities.

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Therefore, this study reveals that within the interactive feedback platforms, readers employ ideological strategies not only to represent individual bias or sentiment, they also suggest that readers intentionally and discursively construct other readers' perceptions of news discourse. Thus, comments spur responses from other readers, and therefore sustain the crisis situation within news feedback platforms.

Furthermore, this study establishes that interactions on news feedback forums are largely based on shared knowledge of the society or situation. This knowledge is reflected when commenters tend to mean more than they say. It also notes that social crises give rise to linguistic choices that are controlled by the emotions of writers and readers.

One proposition made obvious by this study is that crises news is sensitive and capable of creating reprisals. For this reason, ideological strategies are very likely going to continue to feature within interactive feedback comments on online reports of socio-political crises in Nigeria.

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